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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THINKING AND THE WORLD IN THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF HANNAH ARENDT

Bachelor's thesis

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Tartu  
2016

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## Introduction

In the wake of the 2016 US presidential elections, the *New York Times* published a collection of opinion pieces called “What Happened on Election Night”. Various authors tried to grapple with the unexpected political event that pulled the rug under those who had long proclaimed that liberalism was the end of history. Kevin Baker writes: “A friend called to say that this is what it felt like in Britain, as Brexit was going down. We are in uncharted territory now, a place where there are no directions or guidelines”. Others relied on historical examples (the victory of Ronald Reagan, the transition from Lyndon B. Johnson to Richard Nixon) to understand Trump’s victory and to find guidance. Ultimately nobody had a true answer and, as one writer noted, it was (and still is) too early to tell *what’s it all about*. (What Happened on Election Day, 2016) The human urge to find meaning, however, is impatient, as well as our need to reconcile ourselves with the world we live in – to restore *hope*. Without it, we would not have the audacity to take action in the face of “the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations” (Arendt 1979: 352).

The work of the German-born Jewish American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) will be a fruitful source for anyone trying to comprehend today’s political climate. In my thesis I will not take upon this task, but the disarray of current times will certainly haunt us in specific passages. For the moment, I will put aside the opinion leaders and turn to Arendt herself. The aim of this thesis is to establish the interdependence between thinking and the world (as in politics) in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. This involves an analysis of the apparent antagonism between the life of the mind and of political action that Arendt presents in her seminal essay about the topic of thinking, “Thinking and Moral Considerations” (1971) and later in her book *The Life of The Mind, Volume One: Thinking* (1971). I will attempt to overcome this tension by relying on various other texts by Arendt.

In her work, Arendt reveals how vulnerable our mental faculties are – thinking and judging – during times of crises. Her most infamous revelation is the concept, “the banality of evil”. According to her, evil can be committed without malicious intent through sheer thoughtlessness. However, a typical analysis of thoughtlessness does not include an examination of our relationship with the world. It is my aim to set the groundwork for a

deeper analysis of the inability to think and to judge that is based on Arendt's critique of modernity; namely, the loss of tradition and the disintegration of the common world. These developments make people feel uncertain about the world. I will argue that our mental abilities depend on the worldly condition of human beings and, thus, must be examined together with it. The banality of evil is not merely the sign of thoughtlessness in an individual or in a society; it is rather a symptom of distrust about the world. Therefore, a comprehensive look into the notion of the banality of evil should include an analysis of our relationship with the world. Although I will not focus on banality of evil in my thesis, I will discuss it as the basis of the modern world in order to proceed to an analysis of the relationship between thinking and the world.

In the first chapter, "The Primacy of Appearance: The Common Sense and The World", I will underline the phenomenological nature of Arendt's political thought. The central notion of politics is the world understood as a public realm. Common sense is the sense of the world – it establishes the world as a *common* reference point for everyone by guaranteeing the inter-subjective validity of sense experience and communication.

The second chapter, "The Experience of Thinking", is divided into two subchapters. In the first subchapter, "Thinking: A Comparison with Knowing", I will delineate the defining features of thinking based on "Thinking and Moral Considerations" and *The Life of The Mind, Volume One: Thinking*. The most defining feature of thinking is withdrawal from the world of appearances. In the second part, "Conscience: Two-In-One", we will clarify the link between thinking and the conscience. More importantly, it will set up the activity of thinking as the dialogue between me and myself in solitude.

Considering these two chapters, the guiding question for the subsequent chapters will emerge: does thinking belong to the world? In other words, what role does thinking – an activity that presupposes a withdrawal from the world and is against our common sense – occupy in politics that is defined by a concern for the world?

The third chapter, "Thinking in Times of Emergencies", is divided into two subchapters. In the first subchapter, "'When The Chips Are Down': How Thinking Can Prevent Catastrophes", I will reconstruct the answer Arendt gives to the aforementioned question. According to Arendt, thinking becomes relevant for politics during times of crises, more particularly in totalitarian circumstances. Here I will introduce another faculty of the mind

– judgement. During times of crises thinking liberates judgement from fixed rules. In the second subchapter, “The Impotence of Thinking at Times of Emergencies”, I will critique Arendt’s answer based on her own work. The crux of my critique is the fact that thinking can prevent a catastrophe only for myself and, thus, it is impotent from the perspective of politics that has the world rather than the self, as its standard.

The fourth chapter, “Thinking in Modern Times”, is divided into three subchapters. In the first subchapter, “The Loss of Common Sense, Logical Reason and Arendt’s Refutation of The Cartesian Ego”, my aim is to demonstrate that mental faculties such as thinking and judging are not possible under the conditions of isolation and loneliness. In order to do so, I will describe the consequences of losing common sense for our ability to think. In the second subchapter, “*Selbstdenken* and Representative Thinking”, my aim is to overcome the subjective nature of the activity of thinking. I will mainly rely on Arendt’s early essay “Men in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing” (1959) and her posthumous work *Lectures in Kant’s Political Philosophy* (1982). First, we arrive at the notion of *Selbstdenken* or independent thinking that relies on public examination in order to free itself from prejudice. Second, we consider “representative thinking” that gives our judgements inter-subjective validity. Here the standard of thinking is not merely agreement with myself, but with the public. In the third subchapter, “Reconciling with Modern Times: The Thinker as a Pearl Diver and The Redemptive Power of Judgement”, I reconsider what role thinking could occupy in the world. I will conclude that thinking is important for politics in modern times characterised by a loss of tradition and, consequently, inability to orient in the world. In these times, thinking can actually redeem the past from the perils of tradition and judgement – liberated from tradition – can give new meaning to worldly affairs during times of increasing meaninglessness. In this way, thinking upholds the public realm and inspires hope in politics — the modern world might be unpredictable, but at least we have retained our ability to ascribe meaning. This ability is not limited to opinion leaders of the *New York Times*, rather like Kant’s public use of reason, it is endowed in every individual. In order for thinking to matter politically, one has to sound out their opinions and judgments in public.

In conclusion, in the end of my thesis, I hope to have brought to light the deep interdependence between thinking and the world. On the one hand, the relationship with the world helps to keep thinking in good condition, and an open examination of thinking by

others maintains its' critical capacity. On the other hand, thinking as a quest for meaning, reconciles us with the unpredictable world that has been rendered senseless with modernity. Judgement, manifestation of thinking in the world, saves political phenomena from meaninglessness and enlarges the political sphere. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, it was precisely this activity that the opinion-writers from the *New York Times* were engaging in.

## 1. The Primacy of Appearance: Common Sense and The World

For Arendt, politics is characterised by its phenomenological character (Beiner 1982: 110). In this chapter, I will argue that is precisely Arendt's idea of the primacy of appearance that grounds her phenomenological approach to politics. This will encompass her idea of common sense and the world as a public realm. In addition, this will set the stage for Arendt's "phenomenology of thinking" as Richard J. Bernstein calls it quite paradoxically since the condition for the activity of thinking seems to be withdrawal from any experience at all (Bernstein 2001: 286). In the end of this chapter, I will formulate the guiding question for subsequent chapters, namely, does thinking belong to the world?

Surprisingly, the beginning of *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt's unfinished exploration of the mental activities — thinking, willing and judging —, begins not with an adoration of the invisible life of the mind, but an exaltation of appearance:

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. ... In this world which we enter, appearing from nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*.... In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth. (Arendt 1981: 19)

For Arendt, *to be* means *to appear*. Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty — "I can flee being only into being" — Arendt maintains that one can flee appearance only into appearance (*Ibid.*: 23). Accordingly, our feeling of reality is guaranteed by the simultaneous existence as an object that appears and a subject who perceives (*Ibid.*: 20-22). The primacy of appearance is linked to Arendt's rejection of the two-world fallacy: the life of the mind is located in men existing in the world of appearances and the two-world fallacy is an incorrect conclusion from the experience of thinking which removes the world from being present to the thinker. Such experience is not an indication of an immaterial realm — "a true being" — behind "mere appearance" (*Ibid.*: 30). We can never *escape* from the priority of

appearance which always precedes whatever domain a thinker might designate as truer (*Ibid.*: 23). Indeed even when we are *looking* inward, we are expecting something to be *revealed* to the mind (*Ibid.*: 24).

The principle of appearance is central to Arendt's work that is unmistakeably phenomenological, indicating the influence of her two teachers Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. It is within this tradition that her reflections on thinking and the world should be understood. I will now proceed to her analysis of common sense that will further establish her view that "to be" is "to appear". To begin with, some preliminary words on the term "common sense" are needed.

The history of the term "common sense" is multifaceted. The English expression is derived from the Latin "*sensus communis*" and is equivalent to "*Gemeinsinn*" in German. The history of the term is separated into two strands: common sense as an inner sense that unites our five senses (the Greek origin) and common sense as a sense that is common to, and thus unites people (the Stoic and Roman tradition). Moreover, a theory of common sense emerges at the end of the 18th century in Britain (most notably the Scottish school), according to which there are intuitively known principles that comprise a healthy understanding opposed to scepticism or nonsense. (Wenzel 2005: 82) In Arendt both developments of the term can be found: common sense as an inner sense that binds our five senses together and common sense as something that unites anyone from whom we can presuppose its possession (Arendt 1981: 50). She does not ascribe to the Scottish school's theory of common sense.

I will base Arendt's definition of common sense on *The Life of the Mind* and *The Human Condition* because these books will also be our guide in the upcoming chapters. The account of common sense that emerges from this literature is phenomenological. However, it is important to note that most readers of Arendt build her understanding of common sense from her posthumous work, *Lectures of Kant's Political Philosophy* where Arendt deals with the faculty of judgement. Based on Kant's understanding of common sense in aesthetic judgements, Arendt describes common sense as an operation of reflection that is a condition of communication and of the inter-subjective validity of judgements. Considering that Arendt only departs from her phenomenological view of common sense when she is interpreting Kant's aesthetic judgement and, moreover, that these are posthumously



published lectures, a reliance on what Arendt previously and consistently has written about common sense is justified.<sup>1</sup> I will proceed to elucidate that view of common sense.

Arendt defines common sense as the mental ability that enables experience to occur and for experience to be accompanied with a feeling of realness. To begin with, common sense is the highest sixth sense that harmonizes the other senses. This ensures that the object I see, hear, touch etc. is one and the same for all individual senses. It guarantees the feeling of realness of a particular sense experience. Here Arendt relies on Thomas Aquinas. (*Ibid.*)

Furthermore, common sense reassures the worldly or inter-subjective validity of these sense experiences. Since for Arendt, being is appearing, the reality of an object in a world of appearances means to remain the same long enough to be recognised by many subjects. They might see the object from different perspectives but agree on its identity. This agreement is based on the *worldly context* that we share with the members of the same species and that ascribes every single object with meaning. (*Ibid.*: 45-46, 50) This worldly context is achieved through common sense, which coordinates our private senses in every individual so as to produce a perception of a single world that is recognised by others as well. This provides us with shared points of reference that allow us to communicate and to relate to one another and integrate new sense data to the continually unfolding common world. It is through participation in this common world and being recognised by others that my experiences gain inter-subjective validity (*Ibid.*; Arendt 1998: 208-209, 283) Common sense, thus, is a sense of the world and a guarantor of my sense of reality.

In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt writes of the world in the general sense as in the world of appearances — “both natural and artificial” (Arendt 1981: 19). However, we are interested in the world in its political meaning that Arendt formulates most notably in *The Human Condition*. So, in this thesis, the world represents a common public realm that is distinct from the private realm of the household. It is not natural, but is concerned with the human artefact. It is man-made and, so, characterized by relative permanence. (Arendt 1998: 52) In this sense it is different from the economic or social realm whose guiding principle is consumption and functionality, but is similar to culture (Arendt 1993c: 208). The public

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<sup>1</sup> A defence of a phenomenological account of common sense in Arendt’s work: Borren, M. 2013 “A Sense of the World”: Hannah Arendt’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, 2: 225-255

realm is essentially pluralistic relying on the living together of free and equal citizens. This equality is not sameness as it is for mass society because citizens distinguish themselves through action and speech. The central concept of the world is power — not obedience — arising when people act together for a common cause. (Arendt 1998: 52) Hence, the world — a public realm — is a place of appearances and makes politics essentially phenomenal.

The public realm *fixes* the worldly context made possible by our common sense. The world as a common reference point endows our identity, experiences and actions with a relatively stable narrative that helps us orient in it and communicate with others. Maurizio d'Entrèves writes: “The reality of the world and of the self can thus be secured only by sharing our existence with others, that is, by living in a world which is public and common” (2001a: 37).

In *The Human Condition* Arendt formulates an understanding of human activities that is — though silently — in dialogue with Heidegger's metaphysics. Heidegger's influence on Arendt's work cannot be overstated, thus some remarks are necessary. This will help us further comprehend the context of Arendt's thought. According to Arendt Heidegger's ontology — specifically, “Being-in the-world” as the ground for “*Dasein*” — created an unprecedented possibility of examining the political realm since it enabled unprejudiced philosophical access to phenomena *qua* phenomena. However, Arendt also noted that Heidegger still held the traditional bias against politics as a philosopher, thus not fulfilling the potential his work carried for politics. (Benhabib 1996: 51-52) Although Heidegger makes “Being-with others” a constitutive mode of being for *Dasein*, it is inauthentic. The condition through which the true meaning of humanness is revealed, is not plurality, but “Being-unto-death”, i.e. the experience of the temporality and finitude of *Dasein*. (*Ibid.*: 53, 104) As Arendt writes: “The essential character of the Self is its absolute Self-ness, it's radical separation from all its fellows (Arendt quoted in *Ibid.*: 54).” Thus, in Arendtian terminology for Heidegger Man, not Men, inhabit the world. We will later see that this atomization of the self, in other words isolation from others, will make one more susceptible to thoughtlessness — a point that Arendt underlines in her interpretation of Heidegger's work (*Ibid.*: 104-105).

In addition, there is no account of action as in acting with others in Heidegger's metaphysics (*Ibid.*: 106). While Heidegger centred on the eventual mortality of being,

Arendt emphasises natality. First, in the sense of being thrown into the world at birth — this is similar to Heidegger — and, second, in the sense of action that brings something new into the world by our own initiative — it is precisely here where she departs from Heidegger. (*Ibid.*: 109)

This admiration for the world and its phenomenal nature will form the basis of the subsequent investigation into the relationship between the world and the faculty of thought. As will become clear in the next part of the thesis, thinking is an activity characterized by withdrawal from the world of appearances *in solitude* and is out of order with the feeling of realness that is given by common sense. Thus a question emerges: does thinking belong to the world? This question is political: what kind of role — if any — does the *solitary* business of thinking have in the world where men exist in plural?

## 2. The Experience of Thinking

In the next two subchapters I will be following the structure of the essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations” and the book *The Life of The Mind, Volume One: Thinking*. These are the defining literature from Arendt about thinking. The aim is to delineate the experience of thinking: firstly, in comparison with knowledge and, secondly, as a dialogue between me and myself.

### 2.1 Thinking: A Comparison with Knowing

The first clue to the faculty of thinking in her essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations” is the fact that we should be able to demand it from everyone: erudition should not be the precondition for the ability to think. (Arendt 1971: 422-423) This is linked to her assumption that thinking is connected with the ability not to do evil. We will set aside the moral dimension of thinking for now, as did Arendt in the beginning of her essay. Rather we will set upon the task of comparing thinking to knowledge. Knowing depends on intellectual capacities and education which are not given equally to everybody. Though these enterprises are often confused with one another, the *worldly* business of knowing will expose in contrast the *unworldly* features of thinking. The latter are search for meaning, power to destabilise, withdrawal from the world of appearances, swiftness and being out of order with common sense. In sum, this subchapter will introduce the possible tensions between thinking and the world.

Knowledge is understood as the result of common sense reasoning that posits science as its corresponding enterprise *par excellence*. The aim of knowledge is to establish truth consistent with sense evidence. Hence, knowledge and, by consequence, science are limited by the world of appearances. It may seem like the scientist is withdrawing from it, firstly, when she is trying to undercover the hidden functionality behind an appearance, in which case there is an effort to make the unseen (atoms, molecules, particles) *manifest*. Secondly, she withdraws from it in order to think, but here thinking is used only temporally as an instrument for an end that is determined by what is worthwhile knowing or, in other words,

to find better methods towards it. (Arendt 1981: 54, 58) How does thinking compare with these characteristics of knowledge?

According to Arendt, it was Kant who first separated thinking from knowing by isolating reason (*Vernunft*), or the urge to think and to understand in order to derive *meaning*, which goes beyond the verifiable knowledge achieved by the intellect (*Verstand*) (Arendt 1971: 422). Thought searches for meaning not by asking “what something is or whether it exists at all — its existence is always taken for granted — but *what it means for it to be*” (Arendt 1981: 57). By virtue of its content, the latter question will not find resolve by investigating the world of appearances like the former questions do. Instead thinking is fundamentally without resolve — the answers to the questions about meaning are never final since they are detached from the criterion of truth or sense experience.

Furthermore, thinking is sheer activity — it has no other object apart from itself. Governed only by the principle of non-contradiction it moves relentlessly without any positive results, merely to “eliminate the obstacles by which reason hinders itself” (Kant quoted in Arendt 1971: 422). These obstacles might be prejudices, sensations and experiences — anything that might make reason impure and not self-resilient, i.e. not free from men's self-imposed immaturity (Arendt 1982: 32). This is what critical thinking is for Kant — a third way from dogmatism and scepticism. However, the aftermath of Kant's critique of metaphysics was “a destruction of all possible foundations of metaphysical systems”, an outcome that Kant himself never fully intended or realized (Arendt 1971: 422). Here another difference between knowledge and thinking comes to light: while Arendt calls knowledge a world-building faculty, thinking destabilises anything it reaches. How so?

The thirst of knowledge is directed at the stillness of results which can be stored in the fabric of our world (*Ibid.*: 421). On the other hand, thinking “is like the veil of Penelope: it undoes every morning what it had finished the night before” (*Ibid.*: 425). To be fair, the thirst for knowledge can never be fully extinguished given the ever-expanding frontiers of the unknowable together with the concept of unlimited progress where only “the truer and truer” can be achieved, not *the* truth (*Ibid.*: 421, Arendt 1981: 58). Nevertheless the questions of knowledge that might emerge from practical needs or curiosity can find *satisfying* answers. In this way, the activity of knowing is world-building because it can achieve certain permanence when the intended goal is attained. (Arendt 1971: 421) There

are no satisfying answers, however, for thinking because it cannot test its own results against the unmovable evidence of the appearing world. Thus it undermines everything it touches — even its own conclusions since they will eventually become obstacles that prevent its sheer movement.

This is an important feature of thinking since it has an undermining consequence to all established criteria for conduct — thinking is anti-authoritarian. A good illustration for this unbalancing effect of thinking comes from Socrates, who is an exemplary thinker for Arendt. Three similes are used for Socrates: a midwife, a gadfly and an electric ray. We will briefly consider all of them — each of which clearly demonstrates the purely negative and destabilising nature of thinking.

Firstly, Socrates calls himself a *midwife*. Like the midwives in Greece who were sterile, Socrates had nothing, no truths or values, to teach. Still he helped others to deliver the implications of their own beliefs, which usually meant that under the pressure of close examination the interlocutor's opinions were exposed as mere “wind-eggs”. (*Ibid.*: 432)

Secondly, Socrates describes himself as a *gadfly*. Just like a fly that wakes you up in the middle of the night from peaceful slumber and, unable to turn your attention away from it, stops you from falling asleep again, Socrates aroused men from thoughtlessness to examine matters more closely. (*Ibid.*)

However, while “the wind of thought”, a metaphor for thinking that Socrates used, might arouse an individual to analyse concepts, this cannot be done without first unfreezing matters that previously seemed fixed, like established values or rules. Thinking inserts perplexity where there used to be certainty. Therefore, Socrates is like an *electric ray* — with the perplexities within himself (starting from knowing that he does not know) he paralyses others with whom he comes into contact with. (*Ibid.*: 433-434) Contact with this destructive tendency of thinking may leave the thinker *unable to move* after emerging from it. How to orient oneself in a world that suddenly has lost certainty? I will turn to this question in a slightly different context in the final chapter of the thesis.

Here, one might wonder about whether thinking as such is a form of nihilism. On the contrary, nihilism is an escape from this futile enterprise to a conclusion (that there are no

values) from which further thinking is no longer necessary. Hence, from the perspective of the thinking activity, nihilism is the other side of dogmatism. (*Ibid.*: 435)

Next we turn to the precondition of thinking: the withdrawal from the world of appearances. This is an apparent difference from knowing. To be sure, all mental activities, while externally invisible, take place in the world of appearances, inside the mind of a being with the capacity and need to appear to others. To be exact, in order to think, we must turn away *from the world's being present to the senses*. (Arendt 1981: 75-76) Instead it deals with invisibles — objects that are absent but made present to the mind through imagination (*Ibid.*: 77). To quote Arendt:

In order for us to think about somebody, he must be removed from our presence; so long as we are with him we do not think either of him or about him; thinking always implies remembrance; every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought (*Ibid.*: 78).

Thus unshackled from the resistance of matter, thinking is characterised by an outstanding *swiftness*. Arendt argues that it is from this experience where the philosopher's disdain for the body as an obstacle arises. Indeed similarly to the fact that thinking requires the interruption of all doing, such as participation of the world of appearances, it is true that the outside world is an intrusion for the thinker. (*Ibid.*: 44) Therefore, even though mental activities take place between men who inhabit the world of appearances, a familiar antagonism between *Vita Contemplativa* and *Vita Activa* arises from the experience of thinking itself.

Based on these characteristics of thinking, Arendt concludes, referring to Heidegger, that thinking is somehow “out of order” with the world. By demanding for people to stop-and-think, to interrupt the common sense experience guaranteeing my feeling of realness, being “at home in the world” with others, it is as though thinking is contrary to human condition. (*Ibid.*: 50, 78) This is “the intramural warfare between thought and common sense” (*Ibid.*: 80). It is intramural since it is located within a thinker herself: between her common sense that fits her into the common world with others, and her need to think that periodically removes her from it (*Ibid.*: 81). This upheaval of thinking against common sense leads to the philosopher's veneration for death (the immateriality of thought released from the prison of the flesh) and disdain for politics. This is a guarded stance against the common sense within the thinker who was well aware of the meaninglessness of her enterprise for

the worldly affairs. (Ibid.: 83-84) Knowledge as an extension of common sense and a world-building enterprise would never so radically depart us from feeling of realness (Ibid.: 56).

In conclusion, we have delineated some necessary differences between thinking and knowledge. On the one hand, we have the endless quest for meaning, which transcends the world of appearances and destabilises every object in its grasp. Thinking moves in an immaterial realm unhindered by the concreteness of real entities and, as such, is swift. For the same reason, it is out of order with our common sense experience of being alive in the world with others. On the other hand, we have the world-building investigation of the appearances. The results of this enterprise become building blocks of the growing treasure of knowledge about our universe and thus help us make ourselves feel at home in the world. We will leave the tensions between thinking and common sense to be the subject matter of the fourth chapter and consider conscience as a by-product of thinking.

## **2.2 Conscience: Two-In-One**

Our aim in this chapter is to find a link between thinking and the conscience. Arendt's approach is to select an exemplary thinker whose experience of thinking could indicate the way to a conscience. It was mentioned that Arendt chose Socrates, and I will begin this chapter with a brief justification for it. Having set Socrates as our guide, Arendt traces two propositions from him, which will become sources for understanding the conscience. Therefore, the second part of this chapter will outline Arendt's interpretation of these two propositions. Here we will discover the “two-in-one” quality of consciousness and thinking as the dialogue between me and myself in solitude.

Socrates is a “citizen among citizens” — not an isolated philosopher, but a man fond of the market place — a representative of everyone, not of a learned few (Arendt 1971: 427). He did not write books — he had more urgent matters to attend to, namely to think, instead of *doing*. Moreover, it is precisely not knowledge that Socrates excels at — after all he knows that he knows nothing at all —, but the activity of thinking. (Ibid.)

Much like the futility and swiftness of the thinking activity that we described in the earlier chapter, Plato's Socratic dialogues are aporetic — the argument never arrives at a concrete



conclusion, but goes around in circles and is always in motion (*Ibid.*: 428-429). The engine of this movement is the peculiarity of our concepts: they are unseen (every imagined house is already a particular house), but they relate to things that manifest in the appearing world. Socrates's endeavour to find out their meanings — *what is courage?*, *what is justice?* — pertain to the usage of these words, to the particular cases where we have, for instance, *seen* courageous men, but not to the concept itself which is non-appearing. (*Ibid.* 429) Therefore, if a word is like a frozen thought, then thinking must unfreeze it whenever it wishes to grasp its original meaning (*Ibid.*: 431). But once we do this, words suddenly become slippery and nothing stays put anymore (*Ibid.*: 429). The original meaning will remain beyond our grasp and, thus, the thought-train keeps on moving.

This desire to grasp the unseen concept corresponds to thinking which goes beyond the verifiable realm of sense data in search for meaning. Our goal now is to outline a connection between thinking and conscience. Indeed Socrates gives two closely related propositions in the *Gorgias* that deal with this issue (*Ibid.* 438). These propositions are accidental by-products of the thinking activity. They are not its intended conclusion nor a cognition about morality (*Ibid.*: 439).

The first proposition is the following:

It is better to be wronged than to do wrong (Plato quoted in *Ibid.*).

The second proposition:

It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me* (Plato quoted in *Ibid.*).

Both of the statements are subjective: what counts is the person who has the alternative between, in the first proposition, either committing a wrong or to be wronged, or, in the second proposition, being in disagreement with himself or with others. Against the grain of the common moral value of selflessness, Socrates is here only concerned with his own person. Similarly, these propositions are convincing in as much one would agree with their underlying assumption: *if you were like me*, that is if you were thinking like Socrates, you would agree that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. (*Ibid.*: 440) What lies in the experience of thinking that makes such a statement convincing?

To uncover the answer to this question we should turn to the second proposition: how could *I* be harmonious with *myself*, if I am one? Doesn't it take at least two tunes for a harmony? So when *I* am in or out of harmony with *myself*, there must be some sort of difference in me that makes this kind of relation possible. In other words, *I* and *myself* cannot be absolutely identical like a rose is a rose. Arendt calls this difference the two-in-one quality of consciousness — *synedenai* in Ancient Greek, meaning “to know *with myself*”. (Arendt 1981: 183) I will now explain this notion more closely.

To be sure, as long as we live, we are conscious, either when we are engaged in mental activities or when we are drawn out of the life of the mind by our surroundings. Consciousness is merely the awareness of the identity of the ‘I-am’, which makes the continuity of my *self* possible. The duality in consciousness will remain hidden until the reflexive nature of mental activities will actualise it. All mental activities — thinking, judging, willing — are reflexive in virtue of acting back to the mental agent. (*Ibid.*: 74-75) In other words, I experience duality in my consciousness “when it is not related to things that appear but only to itself” (*Ibid.*: 187). This is only possible in solitude when I keep myself company. Among others — when I am related to things that appear — this duality dissolves and I become *one* again. (*Ibid.*: 185) This is the explanation of Socrates' assertion that he, *being one*, can nevertheless be out of harmony with himself, i.e. the two-in-one quality of consciousness. Still it is not yet clear why it is worse to contradict myself than others. The answer to this, as has been pointed out, lies in the experience of thinking.

It should be clear that consciousness and thinking are not the same. The duality within my consciousness is requisite for thinking which *actualises* this difference in solitude. In thinking, this duality becomes the dialogue between me and myself. Acting thus back into itself, thinking turns into an activity. This activity is held together only by the axiom of non-contradiction. The criterion here is not the truth that *compels* assent either by evidences from intuition or by inevitable conclusions from mathematical or logical reasoning, but agreement (with myself) in the dialogue I have with myself. (*Ibid.*: 185-186) This will be a contentious aspect about thinking in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

From this we are able to answer why it is worse to contradict myself than others. It leads us to an explanation of conscience. The conscience is a *by-product* of thinking whereby I ask and answer questions from myself. In such a cross-examination, I can either agree or

disagree with myself. However, unlike another person with whom I might have a disagreement, I can never get away from myself — *I have to live with myself*. In this case surely, it is better to be at odds with the world than with the one person I am forced to live with (*Ibid.*: 188) As Arendt writes with respect to Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*:

It is better for you to suffer than to do wrong because you can remain the friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer. (*Ibid.*)

This, obviously, is a metaphor for the axiom of non-contradiction. To be my own friend means not to contradict myself, to be in harmony with oneself.

However, there is ambivalence about the status of this relationship. It cannot truly be one between friends, which assumes equality among partners. The other whom I encounter in solitude is also a source of anxiety since it is somebody who casts judgment. Arendt writes later: "What makes a man fear this conscience is the anticipation of the presence of a witness who awaits him only *if* and when he goes home (*Ibid.*: 190)." Here it is meant that *if* the thinker is in solitude and not disturbed by the world of appearances.

With respect to the conscience, Arendt points to a disturbing paradox: "only good people are ever bothered by a bad conscience whereas it is a very rare phenomenon among real criminals" (Arendt 1971: 418). However, what does it then mean to be a real criminal? In order to repent you must have a conscience, but in this case you are never a "real criminal" to begin with. On the contrary, real criminals are those who lack conscience and, thus, are never truly weighed down by it. To lack a conscience means to cease to think since it is thinking that actualises the two-in-one quality in consciousness and has conscience as its accidental result. Surely, real criminals are conscious. But when they withdraw from the company of others — a predicament that is severely unfavourable to them — they do not engage in self-examination. Thus they are deprived of "the witness" that awaits them at home. A person like that would never "mind committing any crime, since he can be sure that it will be forgotten the next moment" (Arendt 1981: 191). In other words, he would not mind contradicting himself. This is Arendt's concept of banality of evil.

The connection between the faculty of thinking and abstaining from evil is therefore the following: thinking will as its by-product set limits to what a person can do by the force of the axiom "Do not contradict yourself." Thinking does not make people moral, but in

Shakespeare's words, quoted by Arendt, "fills a man full of obstacles." (*Ibid.*) These limits will vary from person to person and will be self-imposed (Arendt 2003b: 101). Hence, thinking does not guarantee that evil will be prevented or that everybody thinks identically with similar results. However, if a person does not think, it will be *more likely* that she will commit evil or remain a bystander.

Moreover, conscience is not ever-present within us like Jiminy Cricket was the inseparable companion of Pinocchio. It belongs to the life of the mind, which is defined by solitude and withdrawal from the world of appearances. I leave "the witness" at home to be reckoned with only when I return (Arendt 1981: 190).

Lastly, the conflict of conscience should not be mistaken as one of feelings. The philosopher herself rightly objects to this. Though she admits that people have guilty or innocent emotions, these sentiments are not correct indicators of right and wrong. On the contrary, these are aroused by a contradiction between old customs and new rules and, as such, indicate rather a problem of conformity, not morality. A real conflict of conscience, the disagreement between me and myself in solitude, is discovered and resolved by thinking only, not by feeling. (Arendt 2003b: 107)

In conclusion, we have now outlined the experience of thinking: first, by comparing it to the worldly experience of knowledge and, second, by defining it a dialogue between me and myself. Some of the antagonisms between thinking and the world have been already highlighted. To begin with, there is the fact that when we think, we withdraw from the world of appearances. We think *in solitude*. Moreover, thinking is out of order with common sense by necessitating a cessation of the world being present to the senses. Thirdly, it destabilises settled norms and may paralyse the thinker when she emerges from it to the world. In addition, it is not world-building because it is essentially without results, undoing any progress. Having analysed thinking as the dialogue between me and myself, perhaps the most important contrast between the life of the mind and of political action surfaces: the standard for thinking is the self, while the standard for politics is the world. This contrast will be brought into full view in the next chapter.

### 3. Thinking in Times of Emergencies

Does thinking belong to the world? If so, what role does thinking occupy in the world? I will now return to the question posed in the first chapter. My aim is to analyse Arendt's answer to this question from her first critical essay on the subject, "Thinking and Moral Considerations" that reappears in *The Life of the Mind, Volume One: Thinking*. I will divide my analysis into two subchapters. First, I will rebuild Arendt's answer from the aforementioned sources. According to it thinking is relevant for the world in times of emergencies. In the second subchapter, I will demonstrate why this answer is ultimately unsatisfactory. This will lead us to another faculty of the mind — judgement — that makes thinking *appear* in the world.

#### 3.1 "When The Chips Are Down": How Thinking Can Prevent Catastrophes

Arendt poses an urgent question in her essay, "Thinking and Moral Considerations": how can something relevant *to the world* come from such a resultless enterprise (1971: 426)? Is the professional thinker doomed to sneer at the "petty affairs of men" while "common folk" laugh at the star gazing philosopher (Arendt 1981: 82, 84-85)? Creating common ground between those who are engaged in politics and those with the life of the mind, however, is not why the question "Does thinking belong to the world?" is important. After all, the discord between thinking and common sense is an intramural one and pierces every single individual at some point in life. The problem in Arendt's essay is rather if the anti-political essence of thinking — remember Socrates: "I would rather be at odds with the world" — can actually matter for politics? I will now expound the underlying antagonism between politics and morality — defined negatively as the conscience — that is the by-product of thinking.

According to Arendt, thinking is a marginal affair in politics (1971: 445). For a stable political organisation, it might not even be recommended: it does away with general rules for conduct without providing any new ones and electrifies men with an *inability to act* in the world. Consequently morality is pushed aside as irrelevant for the world. Hence, in the debate whether politics is applied ethics, Arendt would be inclined toward political realism,

maintaining that power — which emerges when people act together — not morality is the essence of politics (Arendt 1998: 200). Indeed, she admits to an affinity with Machiavelli in the separation of politics from ethics and the appraisal of political action over else (Arendt 2003b: 80). The justification for such a distinction comes from a difference in criteria. In thinking, the ultimate standard is the self — more precisely consistency with myself — and as such, it divides men into singularities (*Ibid.*: 106). As an entirely negative enterprise, in solitude no common action in the public realm could arise from it. From the perspective of the world, thinking is impotent (*Ibid.*: 79). The political concern is not who suffers more, the wrong-doer or sufferer, but that the wrong has been made. The concern is to have a world where such wrong-doing would not occur at all. (*Ibid.*: 93) Therefore, in politics the ultimate standard is the world, not the self (*Ibid.*: 68).

Here it seems we have severed entirely the relationship between thinking and the world. This is not the case. If thinking is not recommended for political affairs, then non-thinking is dangerous in times of deep political crisis. Two answers emerge in Arendt to the question what exactly counts as such a crisis. The first answer stems from the perspective of political actors in a critical situation. The second answer stems, from the perspective of spectators, who evaluate political events in order to affirm human affairs against modernity and the increasing meaninglessness that accompanies it. Both answers relate back to the faculty of judgement. In the first case, political actors judge in a critical situation. In the second case, spectators judge retrospectively political events. In both cases, the conclusion is that the inability to think has disastrous consequences for the faculty of judging. (Beiner 1982: 100-101) For a moment, I will put aside retrospective judgement and modernity in order to concentrate solely on the judgement of political actors in critical situations.

After formulating conscience as the by-product of thinking that puts limits on what a person can do, Arendt ends the aforementioned essay claiming that thinking is critical for politics in “those rare moments in history” “when the chips are down” (Arendt 1971: 446). Although she does not explicitly define the threat to politics as totalitarianism, considering the essay is an elaboration of her notion of banality of evil that developed through her observation of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the main organizers of the Holocaust, it is reasonable to assume that this is the danger that Arendt has in mind. Indeed one of the main characteristics of the crisis she has in mind is mass thoughtlessness — this is also

crucial for a totalitarian organization (*Ibid.*: 445). How can thinking be relevant in such circumstances?

Arendt underlines two interrelated effects of thinking. Firstly, it dismantles *automatic* standards for evaluation. We have dealt with this in length in the previous chapters. Secondly, this has a liberating effect on our faculty of judgement that she defines similarly to Kant's reflective judgement for aesthetics as a capacity to judge particulars — “this is wrong” or “this is right” *etc* — *without a general rule*. There are no universal laws in politics as there are in science — it is a non-cognitive area based on freedom. Judgement dealing with political phenomena must therefore be autonomous as well. Thinking by eliminating the “general rules which can be taught and learned until they grow into habits” prepares judgement to be free (*Ibid.*: 446). As such, judgement is a manifestation of thought in the world of appearances (*Ibid.*).

But if thinking paralyses the thinker and is essentially not final, one may ask, how do we arrive at the point of a definite judgement? A possible solution to this can be found in an excerpt from Plato's dialogue, *Theaetetus* that Arendt uses to describe thinking as the dialogue between me and myself:

Then it arrives at the limit where things must be decided, when the two say the same and are no longer uncertain, which we then set down as the mind's opinion (Plato quoted in Arendt 2003b: 91-92).

It goes without saying, that since the dialogue between me and myself will continue when I withdraw from company, it is always possible that the two will no longer agree and that opinion, hence, is changed.

I will put aside the question how this carrying over of thought from the immaterial life of the mind to the material world works. It suffices to note that all mental activities carry with them an urge to appear, namely to speak, and the ineffable content of the mind is made communicable with metaphors (Arendt 1981: 98, 103). Now I will move on explain how the absence of free judgement is a risk for a polity.

When unquestioned compliance to rules has become the norm in a society, a political catastrophe will expose morality as empty “table manners” (Arendt 2003a: 43). For a citizen of such a society it will not be the content, but the possession of rules that is relevant. Since this excludes the need to give a *persuasive* account for one set of rules over

another, it makes possible a total reversal of values so long as the old code is immediately exchanged for a new one. Thus, two basic Christian commandments — “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not bare false witness” — were inverted in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia respectively. (Arendt 1971: 436) So, under totalitarianism a perverse situation where every moral act became illegal and every immoral act legal was easily established (Arendt 2003a: 40). In this sense inability to judge resulting from thoughtlessness leaves people vulnerable to extreme political circumstances.

However, when describing the sweeping advance of totalitarianism Arendt argues that this reversal did not hold for every individual:

The few who managed not to be sucked into the whirlwind were by no means the “moralists”, people who had always upheld rules of right conduct, but on the contrary very often those who had been convinced even before the debacle of the objective non-validity of these standards *per se* (2003b: 138-139).

Arendt makes the case that the last stand against totalitarianism resides with those who think, and who had not corrupted their ability to judge freely -- in other words, those whose conscience did not work automatically. In ordinary situations, *stop-and-think* would be deemed irresponsible as an avoidance of duties for the world. “When everybody is swept away unthinkingly” and totalitarianism is on the rise, thinking and consequently judgement — if I participate, I cannot live with myself — turns into a kind of political action, non-participation (Arendt 1971: 445-446). Arendt writes that when human beings are deprived of public space in dark times “they retreat into the freedom of their thought” (1970: 9). To accordingly judge freely is an attempt to withstand the rise of totalitarianism, *at least for myself*.

It is precisely the admission — *at least for myself* — that Arendt makes in the last sentence of her essay that eventually undermines her argument that was intended to be an answer to the question she proposed earlier in the essay: how can something relevant *for the world* come from so resultless an enterprise? To be sure, that was not the central question of the essay, which dealt with the problem of evil and the possibility that thinking could prevent it. She argues convincingly in support of that thesis. However the answer to the question we took as our guideline is not that convincing. In the next subchapter, I will critique her answer from various points ultimately demonstrating that in order for thinking to be relevant for politics it has to overcome its inherent subjectivism.



### 3.2 The Impotence of Thinking at Times of Emergencies

Arendt's argument would be that in order to prevent the banality of evil during political catastrophes such as totalitarianism, it is necessary that we think. However, when a political crisis is already under way, it seems too little, too late (*Ibid.*: 445-446). At this point, the only catastrophe that could be diverted is the breakdown of the thinking ego's inner dialogue. This is because thinking can prevent catastrophes only for only those who already think — just like conscience only bothers those who have it, not “real criminals”. However, what we really want is for the real criminals to think and to have a conscience. Thus, there is an insurmountable limit to what thinking can accomplish when the chips are down — Arendt herself acknowledges it in her essay, “Collective Responsibility” (1968) (2003c: 156-157).

To expound on some of the further problems, let us zoom in on the last section of the essay where Arendt declares that thinking has *political* significance (Arendt 1971: 445). It is hard to imagine what this might be. Arendt herself notes that non-participation, which is the conclusion of the dialogue between me and myself, is unjustifiable from the strictly political sense and can be valid only in the extreme situation of *impotence* or *powerlessness* that has *isolation* as its precondition (2003c: 156). In “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship” (1964) Arendt writes:

I think we shall have to admit that there exist extreme situations in which responsibility for the world, which is primarily political, cannot be assumed because political responsibility always presupposes at least a minimum of political power. Impotence or complete powerlessness is, I think, a valid excuse. (*Ibid.*: 45)

In sum, political considerations do not apply to people in conditions of powerlessness. What, however, remains absolutely valid are moral considerations and those are limited to myself.

Moreover those who think are not “drawn out of hiding” when they refuse to take part, as Arendt writes (1971: 445). Rather they are marked by a withdrawal from the public affairs and silence:

They were neither heroes nor saints, and *they remained completely silent*. Only on one occasion, in a single desperate gesture, did this *wholly isolated and mute element* manifest

itself publicly: this was when the Scholls, two students at Munich University, brother and sister, under the influence of their teacher Kurt Huber distributed the famous leaflets in which Hitler was finally called what he was—a “mass murderer”. (Arendt 2000: 338; my emphasis)

While the Scholls' actions might have had a political significance, they were, according to Arendt, *the only* exception to the “isolated and mute” part of the population who retained the faculty of thought. Those who thought and were able to judge between right and wrong were, furthermore, neither heroes nor saints — we cannot know about them, because they never revealed themselves. How could these silent and separated people have a political significance?

Indeed the prevailing experiences that precede totalitarianism are isolation and loneliness. Isolation and loneliness should be distinguished from one another. Isolation pertains to the political sphere — a person is isolated when she is excluded from the public realm. Isolated people are impotent — they cannot act together for a common cause. Isolation transforms into loneliness when it intrudes into the private life. A person is lonely when she feels deserted by companionship in her life as a whole. In societies where people are broken into singularities in the public and private realm totalitarianism is more likely to emerge and intensify these experiences. (Arendt 1979: 474-475) It should be clear that solitude — when I keep myself company in silent dialogue — is separate from both of these extreme emotions.

Now a new question emerges. Arendt writes that judgement realises thinking by making it appear in the world “*where I am never alone*” (Arendt 1971: 446; my emphasis). Can judgement or any other mental faculties function when men are isolated and alone? When the world in the Arendtian sense has broken up into atoms, is there damage to what Arendt calls the most political of mental faculties, namely, to judgement (*Ibid.*)?

There is some support for a negative answer. Since Arendt depicts the non-participants as silent, perhaps actual speech and auditors are not necessary for judgement? Though mental activities can become manifest through speech, Arendt writes that their need to speak does not presuppose auditors: “Thoughts do not have to be communicated in order to occur, but they cannot occur without being spoken — silently or sounding out in dialogue (Arendt 1981: 98-99).” So, even though we need speech for thinking, this can be carried out within myself without revealing it to the world. Therefore, it seems that it might be possible to

preserve my faculty of thought and, consequently, judgement even in circumstances of widespread isolation and loneliness. Judgement, then, would not make thinking manifest in the world, but would remain a “mind's opinion” not communicated to others.

The next chapter of my thesis is devoted to refuting the idea that thinking is possible even under conditions of isolation and loneliness. On the contrary, based on Arendt's work, I will argue that thinking is deeply rooted in our worldly existence. I will begin by making the case that the deprivation of common sense leads to impaired thinking. Actually, though thinking necessitates a withdrawal from the world, no person can escape the worldly condition of human beings living together. This is a mistake in the tradition of political philosophy since Plato who in his allegory of the cave viewed the realm of human affairs, “the living together of men in a common world”, in terms of an illusion — not the right home for those who aspire truth. (Arendt 1993b: 17) Thus, the philosopher must depart from the sphere of politics to — for instance — a cabin in the forest, as did Heidegger, in order to think in solitude. Arendt argues forcefully against this: although the experience of thinking might seem *unworldly*, it is an error to regard it without any relationship to the world.

## 4. Thinking in Modern Times

### 4.1 The Loss of Common Sense, Logical Reasoning and Arendt's Refutation of The Cartesian Ego

My aim here is to demonstrate that in Arendt's philosophy the inability to think is the consequence of the loss of common sense that guarantees our inter-subjective sense of realness in a common world. I will introduce the idea of “ideological reasoning” from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) as an extreme case of logical reasoning and a side effect of the loss of common sense. Ideological reasoning is a symptom of the loss of common sense. It switches off our sensory relation to the factual world and coerces it to conform to its own rules derived from a single *a priori* postulated idea that claims total explanation of reality. The origin of this development is to be found with modern science that eroded our trust in the sensually given inspiring a subjective turn most profoundly found in Cartesian doubt. In this chapter, this solipsism will be exposed as a fallacy. Moreover, it will become evident that in order to have a dialogue with ourselves in solitude, we must be certain of our reality. Without an inter-subjective recognition of our realness, the mental activity in solitude will also be damaged.

What is ideological reasoning? It does not concern a particular content, but the logical structure of ideologies. This structure is an explanation of a historical (Stalinism) or natural (Nazism) process that is understood by a consistent logical deduction from one supposedly self-evident idea that explains it in entirety. (Arendt 1979: 468-470) Ideological reasoning is an extreme example of logical reasoning. In *The Human Condition*, logical reasoning is defined as a mental faculty without any world relationship — a mere “reckoning with consequences” or “the mind playing with itself when shut off from reality” (Arendt 1998: 284). An example of this is mathematical reasoning (*Ibid.*: 265).

Logical reasoning became the dominant mental ability with the rise of modern science. This is because modern science eroded common sense and gave ground for “specifically modern nihilism” (*Ibid.*: 261). Modern science viewed the earth from an Archimedean standpoint — from abstraction — putting common sense, on which they still relied on in experiments, in disrepute. For instance Galileo's observation that the earth circles the sun

invalidated the common sense experience that sun circles the earth. Although we are indebted to modern science for widening the frontiers of knowledge, it also left our relationship with the world unintelligible. Instead of an apprehensible world with objective qualities given by the senses, we find ourselves in a universe about which we can know only as much as it affects our instruments. (*Ibid.*) With the universe as the reference point for all measurements, everything happening on earth is made relative to it (*Ibid.*: 270). The emergence of a centre-less perspective leads to a distrust of appearances and the adequacy of our sense organs. It is more radical than traditional scepticism: neither truth *nor appearance* is given. (*Ibid.*: 274)

This incites a subjective turn. Firstly, in science the greatest field becomes mathematics — certain knowledge was only achievable where the mind develops its own formulas. So, all sense data are transformed into mathematical symbols — particularity subjugated to universality. (*Ibid.*: 265) The response from philosophy is radical subjectivism or Cartesian doubt.

The conclusion derived from Cartesian doubt — that the existence of everything can be doubted — is the certainty of doubt itself and, therefore, the unshakeable reality of our mental processes (*Ibid.*: 279). This is because of two peculiar features of the experience of thinking, or the thinking ego, according to Descartes: its self-sufficiency — the thinking ego has “no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing” — and worldlessness — meaning when I think I can “feign that I had no body, and that there was no world nor place where I would be” (Descartes quoted in Arendt 1981: 48). The immateriality of the thinking activity ensures that it is not vulnerable to the same kind of suspicion like common sense is. Therefore, my reality is no longer guaranteed by the inter-subjective acknowledgement by others in a common world, but by the sheer functioning of mental states that supposedly do not need any world relationship in order to work. Hence Descartes inserts the Archimedean standpoint into his own mind. The ultimate reference point is not the universe as it is for science, but the patterns of our mind that are the same for everybody. However, this commonness does not establish relatedness with others or the world: “man encounters only himself” (*Ibid.*: 261, 283-284).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt sees ideological reasoning as a result of the extreme deprivation of common sense. Here the loss of common sense is linked with isolation and loneliness. Indeed these experiences are no longer marginal, but have become

widespread in modern societies. The loss of common sense is one of the reasons for the emergence of isolation and loneliness since it erodes our ability to share experiences. (Arendt 1979: 475-476, 478) Arendt writes that the *only* mental capacity that does not need confidence in reality and, thus, is possible under these circumstances is logical reasoning — the singular process of deduction needs no new ideas nor experiences, it is entirely self-generated. When a single *a priori* postulated idea claims total explanation of all phenomena, the relationship between senses and reality is severed. Hence, ideological reasoning is emancipated from reality and represents a “truer reality” concealed behind all phenomena. This amounts to a fictitious reality distinguished by consistency unlike anything found in the sensual world. (*Ibid.*: 470-471) It is precisely this logical consistency and fear of contradicting oneself that transforms ideological reasoning into an inner-compulsion: if I accept premise *A*, I have to accept all its conclusions “down to end of the murderous alphabet” (*Ibid.*: 472). Otherwise my isolated and lonely life will be completely devoid of reason and will become unbearable (*Ibid.*: 473).

Now a question arises about the similarity or difference between logical reasoning that has ideological reasoning as its most extreme example, and thinking as we have defined it in this thesis so far. This question comes about for two reasons. Firstly, is not Cartesian doubt — suspicion about our sense of reality — the result of the thinking activity? Moreover, the certainty that Descartes ascribes to mental processes like logical reasoning is on the basis of the experience of thinking that is essentially immaterial. So, thinking and logical reasoning seem to be similar in as much as both seem to be independent of or even contrary to common sense. Secondly, the governing rule of both thinking and logical reasoning is the axiom of non-contradiction. In light of these two points, the mental faculties seem to be either identical or in proximity.

However, Arendt writes about logical reasoning and thinking in antagonistic terms: the former is a “straight jacket”, while the latter represents “a realm of freedom” (*Ibid.*: 470, 473). Arendt writes explicitly that thinking in modern times has been reduced to logical reasoning, “the highest capacity of man, to its lowest common denominator” (Arendt 1998: 322; Arendt 2005: 318). Why is thinking ultimately a free capacity, although its principle is the axiom of non-contradiction, the axiom that ultimately under totalitarianism turns logical reasoning an inner compulsion? I will argue that this principle, although sufficient for logical reasoning, is insufficient for the activity of thinking. Indeed in this chapter, I will

maintain that it is common sense that makes thinking possible. Without tacit acknowledgement from others of my realness, the dialogue between me and myself is not conceivable. To begin with I will consider again Cartesian doubt and Arendt's refutation of it as a fallacy.

The experience of thinking — summarised best with the word *immateriality* — is the cause of many metaphysical fallacies. These are not mere nonsense, but clues to the experience of thinking about which philosophers have written little about — probably due the stiffness of written words compared to the swiftness of thought (Arendt 1981: 12, 70). The Cartesian *res cogitans* — the senseless creature without a body or any world relationship — is a fallacy much like the idea that behind the appearing world there is a true immaterial world. In her rebuttal of solipsism, Arendt claims that such a being could not even conceive that there is something called reality, let alone a distinction between real and unreal. (*Ibid.*: 48) Moreover, thinking by its nature can neither prove or disprove the reality of anything — the presupposition that *I am* can be derived from *I think* is ultimately doubted like anything else that thinking seizes upon (*Ibid.*: 49). What these fallacies demonstrate is rather how thinking — when it is detached from common sense — goes astray. This is an indication that though consistency might be sufficient for the movement of thinking, it is not sufficient for thinking *well*.

I will begin with an excerpt with my emphases from the last chapter of *Origins of Totalitarianism*. It will work as an illustration of how common sense — the guarantor of my sense of reality — is necessary for thinking.

Solitude can become loneliness; this happens when all by myself *I am deserted by my own self*. Solitary men have always been in danger of loneliness, when they can no longer find the *redeeming grace of companionship* to save them from duality and equivocality and doubt. ... What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy *company of my equals*. In this situation, man *loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts* and that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all. Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time. (*Ibid.*: 476-477)

Arendt writes that although the two-in-one inherent in my consciousness can be actualized only in solitude, I become one only when I appear to others — “it is as though the two into

which the thinking process had split ... clapped together again” (Arendt 1981: 185). In virtue of being perceived and recognised by others as a singular person I confirm my sense of reality and a distinct identity.

Lets now turn to the question left unanswered at the end of the last chapter: can mental faculties function when we are isolated and alone? We were interested in judgement as a manifestation of thinking. In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt claims that although thinking has the urge to speak as well as an urge to appear, it does not need actual auditors in order to occur — silent speech is sufficient.

However, in the excerpt from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt describes the danger of losing trust in oneself as the partner of one's own thoughts when we are isolated and alone. This is because when I am deprived of the company of others who would redeem me from the duality of the thinking ego and affirm my identity, the ability of thinking to undermine everything it reaches might turn against its *self*. So, in the end it is not even the subjective experience that we can be sure of.<sup>2</sup> If I no longer trust myself as a partner for my inner dialogue, I am deserted by myself, and the dialogue is broken. Thus before I can speak of being harmonious with myself, I have to be convinced of the reliability of myself. Did not even Socrates look for confirmation for his thought by asking his fellows do they agree with him or not? The crux of this argument is clearly put by D’Entrèves in his book *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (1989):

Through the world we establish our self-identity and an adequate sense of reality. Once this world of shared experience and action is lost, our identity becomes precarious and reality more doubtful, that is, we can no longer provide a coherent narrative about ourselves, find confirmation of our identity with others, or validate the existence of a common, objective reality. (2001a: 25-26)

For this reason, D’Entrèves equates the loss of the common sense with self-alienation: the deprivation of an inter-subjective acknowledgement of our identity leads to an unreliability of our inner experiences (*Ibid.*: 38).

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<sup>2</sup> In this point I disagree with Margaret Canovan who claims that for Arendt the loss of common sense means that only subjective experiences can be counted on (1998: xiii). This is a Cartesian fallacy and eventually, Arendt argues, together with common sense we will eventually lose the reliability of our subjective experiences as well.



In sum, by judging, making thinking manifest in the world through speech to real auditors, I gain confidence in the reality of my person and, as a result, in myself as a partner of conversation in solitude. In this sense judgement solidifies a healthy practice of thinking. Arendt writes it best in *The Life of the Mind* in the context of perceptual faith, i.e. the belief that what appears is real: “Without this tacit acknowledgement by others we would not even be able to put faith in the way we appear to ourselves (1981: 46).”

Ultimately the fact that in solitude we appear to ourselves — the inherent duality of consciousness and reflexivity of all mental faculties — demonstrates that plurality, that is the defining feature of the world, is also the very condition of the existence of our mental faculties (*Ibid.*: 187). Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* fails to take into account the worldly condition of human beings and of their mental life. The experience of thinking might convince me that there is an immaterial thinking ego, when in reality, “I can flee appearance only into appearance” (*Ibid.*: 23). Thus Richard Bernstein correctly writes in his essay “Arendt on Thinking” (2001) that “although all genuine thinking requires a withdrawal from everyday life, and indeed demands solitude and quietness, one of the greatest dangers of thinking is the illusion that human beings can escape from the everyday world of appearances” (2001: 280).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that thinking and judgement are not possible under conditions of isolation and loneliness that were the existential ground for totalitarianism. This further undermines the role Arendt gives for thinking in her essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations” in times of emergencies when people are increasingly isolated. Ultimately, however, the problem of making thinking matter for politics in Arendt's philosophy is the subjective nature of it. Luckily within Arendt's work parallel to her undertaking of describing the experience of thinking, we can find two modes of thought that relate to the public realm. These are *Selbstdenken* or independent thinking and “representative thinking” or the Kantian “enlarged mentality”. Although thinking remains a dialogue between me and myself, these ways of thinking are oriented towards the world, namely the public.

## 4.2 *Selbstdenken* and Representative Thinking

In this chapter, I will develop the idea in Arendt's philosophy that thinking, though realised when we are in solitude, is possible because of our worldly existence. In the last chapter, I concentrated on the fact that thinking depends on a sense of realness of my own self that can be guaranteed only by the recognition of others in the world. Now I will turn to the public realm as the condition of freedom of thought. This leads to an elaboration of Arendt's writings on Lessing and Kant. First, we arrive at the notion of *Selbstdenken* or independent thinking that relies on the test of an open examination by others in order to free itself from prejudice. Secondly, we consider representative thinking or an “enlarged mentality” as a result of overcoming “obstacles that reason hinders itself with”, namely self-interest.

A good starting point is Arendt's early essay “Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing” (1959). For Arendt, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing is a thinker who remains utterly rooted in the world (Arendt 1970: 5). Indeed in Lessing we seem to find a thinker who was able to overcome of the subjectivity of his enterprise: it was not the self, but the world — more precisely the relationships between people in terms of their viewpoints and opinions — that was the standard for thinking (*Ibid.*: 29). As such his thinking is expansive to new experiences and ideas. Valuing absolute freedom of thought above all else, Lessing would go as far as to do away with coercive logic. The ultimate aim of thinking is to stir the mind to think further even at the price of consistency. Any effort to control thought by compelling arguments or proofs alone was deemed by him to be no better than orthodoxy (*Ibid.*).

Furthermore Lessing's *Selbstdenken* — independent thinking — is not the method of a thinker who arrives at certain conclusions in isolation and then looks for the world to find confirmation, but is from the start oriented towards the world as an alternative way to move within it. As such, it is an extension of the freedom of movement, the most elementary political freedom opposite to enslavement. (*Ibid.*: 9) Because of this, Lessing did not regard thinking as the Platonic silent dialogue between me and myself, but as an anticipated dialogue with others because thought is fundamentally contentious. (*Ibid.*: 10)

Are we here encountering an understanding of thinking that is the opposite of Arendt? I will argue that no. While Arendt does not do away with the principle of non-contradiction,

she does acknowledge the role of perplexity in thinking. Was it not the perplexity — *I know that I know nothing* — that threw Socrates, Arendt's exemplary thinker, into the activity of questioning his fellow citizens? Moreover, although Arendt maintained that thinking is the silent dialogue between me and myself, she shares with Lessing the view that thinking is not oriented towards resolution, but debate. With Lessing, she is actually positioning herself against Plato.

When Arendt claims that Lessing could not agree with Plato's definition of thinking, she is elaborating Plato's distinction between *doxa* and *aletheia*, between opinion and truth. While Plato discards *doxa* in favour of *aletheia*, Lessing (and Arendt) value opinion. (*Ibid.*) In contrast to Plato who lamented that truth, once uttered, is turned into one opinion among many that is contested, Arendt and Lessing disdain the idea that human affairs could be reduced to one truth or one opinion. Indeed Arendt argues throughout her writings that it has been a grand mistake in philosophy since Plato projects abstract and universal categories of truth onto politics — a realm that is essentially pluralistic (Yar 2000: 9). Freedom of thought can only exist among a variety of opinions, just as a free political community presupposes the plurality of people living together (Arendt 1970: 27). Therefore, although for Arendt, thinking is the silent dialogue between me and myself; she is much closer to Lessing's idea of thinking as the anticipated dialogue with others than to Plato's search for truth that would preclude any dispute. Both Lessing and Arendt have more in common with Socrates who preferred to engage in debates with his fellow citizens in the marketplace.

*Selbstdenken* epitomises the critical aspect of thinking. When Socrates goes to the marketplace to examine the opinions of his fellows, he is a midwife — he delivers the full consequences of their thoughts, revealing that most of them are wind-eggs. He purifies opinions from prejudices — what is left is not truth, but criticism. Lessing's *Selbstdenken*, to think independently in order to move freely in the world, is precisely the critical activity of eliminating “the obstacles by which reason hinders itself” (Kant quoted in Arendt 1971: 422). To free ourselves from prejudices is to open up the frontiers of thought.

Indeed a similar account of thinking can be found with Kant. Though he agrees that thinking is a silent dialogue between me and myself in solitude, Kant maintains that for it to be critical and, thus, free thought has to be exposed to the test of an open examination by others. According to Kant, when governments deprive citizens of the freedom to speak or

to publish, it will inadvertently result in the loss of freedom to think and form opinions. Thus, contrary to popular idea, Kant holds that the freedom to think is not inalienable but dependent on a public, who will examine opinions critically similarly to Socrates's midwifery. (Arendt 1982: 40-41)

The question about the relationship between thinking and the actual public realm is important. Thinking as a mental activity in solitude certainly does not equate with the actual disputes among many persons. This is ambiguous with Lessing, for whom the idea of thinking as an activity in solitude does not exist because solitude paralysed the mental faculties (Arendt 1970: 10). However, considering that for Lessing, *Selbstdenken* is understood as an anticipated dialogue, it does not exclude the possibility that real dialogue has not yet come about and is just *imagined* by the thinker in solitude, while expecting probable viewpoints. We will now turn to the role of imagination in what Arendt calls “representative thinking”. It will become apparent that imagination is the root of freedom in thinking.

In her essay, “Truth and Politics” (1967) Arendt writes:

I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. ... The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion. (Arendt 1993d: 241)

The role of imagination is two-fold. First, imagination distances us from the phenomena that engaged us in order to reflect on it from a position where we are less likely to evaluate it based on private interests — it enables critical thinking, *Selbstdenken*. When considering a political issue, the role of critical thinking is to achieve a certain sense of *impartiality*. Secondly, imagination allows us to reflect from the perspectives of others. The more viewpoints we are able to represent in our minds, the more *general* our opinions will be. (*Ibid.*; Arendt 1982: 43)

Hence, the answer to the question proposed in the previous chapter — why does thinking represent a realm of freedom — is most precisely answered by the fact that thinking relies on imagination that is grounded in experiences that it stores in memory and brings alive to the mind in solitude. It is through imagination that thought never loses the relationship with

the world and allows it “to go visiting” quite unlike ideological reasoning (*Ibid.*). Here again the ultimate rootedness of thought in the world is revealed: “thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings” (Arendt 1970: 14).

The role of representative thinking is to formulate opinions that have inter-subjective validity. Indeed Arendt aims to save opinions from disrepute against truth by grounding them on her theory of judgement. Moreover, it is with judgement that the subjectivity of the thinking activity is overcome. I will not here deal with the issue that for many readers of Arendt she left behind two theories of judgement — one for the *Vita Activa* of political actors and one for the *Vita Contemplativa* of political spectators (Beiner 1982; Yar 2000; D'Entrèves 2001b). The important aspect here is that representative thinking, resulting in relative impartiality and generality of our opinions, is the justifying ground of an *inter-subjectively valid* judgement either of deliberating political actors or of spectators who reveal the meaning of political events. This theory of judgement can most notably be found in her posthumous work *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1982) where Arendt identifies representative thinking with Kant's notion of “enlarged mentality,” and formulates an understanding of political judgement based on Kant's reflective judgement in aesthetics.

For Arendt, judgement always entails a commitment to communicate it to others. Communication is only possible when people are able to think from the standpoint of another person — otherwise they would not meet each other in conversation. People are able to think representatively thanks to common sense. (Arendt 1982: 72-73) In *Lectures of Kant's Political Philosophy*, Arendt adopts a slightly more abstract understanding of common sense as an “operation of reflection” or “an effect of reflection upon a mind” not so much as the sense to apprehend the phenomenological nature of a world that we have in common with other people who perceive and appear in it (*Ibid.*). This idea of common sense is based on the first part of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. Citing §40 “Of Taste as a Kind of *Sensus Communis*” Arendt elaborates on common sense as a condition of communication that we can presuppose from everybody with whom we share a common world. Thus, it is the ground for inter-subjectively valid judgements. (*Ibid.*: 71) When we judge, we appeal to the common sense

of others to *woo*, not compel, agreement from them. Thus we never judge merely for ourselves, but as participators of a common world. (*Ibid.*: 72-73)

Regardless of the tensions in Arendt's writings about common sense, the important point here is — echoing the same words by Kant about taste — that with judgement “egoism is overcome” (Arendt 2003b: 142). When it comes to judgement it is not better to be at odds with the world:

Only when it comes to these judgments of taste does Kant find a situation in which the Socratic ‘It is better to be at odds with the whole world than, being one, to be at odds with myself’ loses some of its validity. Here I can’t be at odds with the whole world, though I may still find myself at odds with a good part of it. (*Ibid.*)

In a similar vein, Arendt writes in the essay “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance” (1961) when discussing Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* that the enlarged way of thinking that judgement requires is not primarily a dialogue between me and myself, but always an anticipated communication with others with whom I seek agreement (1993c: 220). This entails liberation from private conditions that might be valid when we are thinking merely for ourselves in solitude, but “are not fit to enter the marketplace, and lack all validity in the public realm” (*Ibid.*). Judgement, furthermore, cannot operate in strict solitude — it is essentially directed towards others “‘in whose place’ it must think” (*Ibid.*). So it is through judgement that the subjective nature of thinking is transcended.

Benhabib considers the fact that Arendt underlines harmony with the *self* as the morally significant experience, while regarding *plurality* as the most important political principle, as a discrepancy between moral judgements and political judgements that Arendt is not able to solve. If moral judgements presuppose that the thinker can go home and be with herself (Platonic tradition), then political judgements presuppose an enlarged mentality for the sake of emancipating the thinker from her own self. (Benhabib 1996: 190-191) Perhaps this irreconcilability should not be lamented — or at least not regretted by the great philosopher herself — since it is a testament to the separation of politics and morality in Arendt’s thought.

In conclusion, in this subchapter we outlined two ways of thinking. First, we elaborated on *Selbstdenken* understood as independent or critical thinking that relied on public deliberation. As an anticipation of dialogue with others it also depended on imagination’s power to make present to the mind the perspectives of other’s in solitude. It is from this

imagination's capacity that thinking gains its special freedom to go visiting in the world, compared to ideological thinking. Moreover, this representative thinking goes beyond the self as the standard of thought, and so is a reliable ground for inter-subjectively valid judgements in the sphere of politics. In the next subchapter I will consider *Selbstdenken* and representative thinking in the context of modernity, specifically focusing on the loss of tradition during growing meaninglessness. I will argue that critical thinking and judgement can elevate the public realm at such times.

### 4.3 Reconciling with Modern Times: The Thinker as a Pearl Diver and The Redemptive Power of Judgement

Was not thinking viewed as an impediment to politics because it destabilised all established criteria? In the final chapter I will elaborate on Arendt's idea that thinking and judging indeed are relevant for times of crises; however, I will argue that this crisis is not limited to the event of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism merely exposed the uncertain terrain of our times that is characterised by a loss of tradition and, consequently, inability to orient ourselves in the world. Thus, in modern times, we can ask, whether such stability, where thinking is not recommended, even exists. Thinking can actually help to save the past from tradition and judgement, and can give meaning to worldly affairs during times of increasing meaninglessness.

Arendt begins her essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations” with an elaboration of two quotations by Nietzsche: “God is dead” and “We have abolished the true world. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one!” (Arendt 1971: 420-421). These declarations delineate Arendt's own diagnosis of the crisis of modern times that is a widespread inability to judge *in the world* after the collapse of the traditional framework of references. The thread flowing from generation to generation that created a sense of continuity is now lost. In its place there lies a gap between past and future that we can no longer bridge by relying on established guidelines for thinking and judging. (Arendt 1993a: 5, 13) Thus in modern times, “we are living in a topsy-turvy world ... where we cannot find our way by abiding by the rules of what once was common sense” (Arendt 2005: 314). The loss of tradition echoes the aftermath of the rise of modern science: by applying an Archimedean standpoint to earth, “we suddenly find ourselves in a topsy-turvy world” (Arendt 1998: 284).

According to Arendt, this breakdown was invisible until the rise of totalitarianism that exploded our categories of political thought and our standards of moral judgement (Arendt 2005: 310). It was this event that exposed traditional moral standards that were thought to be permanent and self-evident in the beginning of the century as mere “table manners” — rules that had been learned until they became habits easily exchangeable with another set (Arendt 2003b: 50). We have realised the severe vulnerability of this faculty and the fact that we no longer have reliable grounds for it. It is no longer just a problem of a political catastrophe, but an underlying issue of our times.



Moreover, we are confronted with completely unprecedented political phenomena — totalitarianism — that requires our judgement in order to reconcile ourselves with a reality where such horrors are possible (Arendt 2005: 308). Although tradition offered men a relatively secure and enduring home in the world, it is helpless to deal with the defining event of the last century. Hence, precisely in the moment of history where judgement is needed like never before, we have lost our footing. The inability to comprehend reality has made us distrustful of it. This further damages our mental faculties that rely on the worldly condition of human beings.

This is best illustrated with the public reaction to Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961) and a similar outcry against Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* (1963) in which Pope Pius XII is accused for his silence during the Holocaust. The problem with these books according to the majority was the fact that the authors dared to take the position of a judge while it was more popular to avoid judgement: “Who am I to judge — I was not there?” Interestingly, this was also the defence that Eichmann used against the court. So, the curious element of these outcries was siding with the culprit: “There sits an Eichmann in every one of us” or “Pope Pius XII is after all only one man and one pope”. (Arendt 2003b: 59)

These are all of course clichés revealing the failure to speak about totalitarianism as a part of the world (Arendt 2005: 308). This is similar to Eichmann's bureaucratic language that protected him against reality (Arendt 2000: 324). Inability to speak is not just a sign of impaired thinking and judging, but shows a declined capacity to communicate — a symptom of a weakened common world. How to repair our relationship with the world? In order to rebuild a comprehensible relationship with the world we must regain our trust in it by way of reconciliation. This will strengthen common sense and help us orient in the world better. Reconciling involves rehabilitating the past separately from tradition and judging to disclose the meaning of political events.

Arendt writes of Lessing's *Selbstdenken* that it needs “no pillars and props, no standards and traditions to move freely without crutches over unfamiliar terrain” (Arendt 1970: 10). Such unfamiliar terrain is the burden of our times — it is the past from which the standpoint of now has become disjointed and leaves us uncertain about our present. Critical thinking seeks to redeem the past by making it meaningful again without the framework of tradition. Arendt likens the critical thinker to a pearl diver who excavates from the depths

fragments of the past that can relate in new ways to our times while the “extinct ages” to which these fragments belong to remain not resuscitated. This activity of revitalizing parts of the past is a creative exercise in thinking that encompasses remembrance, storytelling and imagination. (*Ibid.*: 205-206)

The loss of tradition is actually an advantage. Critical thinking separates the past from tradition disclosing it with unfamiliar freshness — the universal does not dominate over the particular (Arendt 1961: 28-29). This was also Arendt's way of thinking about the Greek polis as the exemplary political organisation. It was not naïve nostalgia, but an effort to rediscover the polis for the present, with eyes unburdened by tradition (D'Entrèves 2001a: 5). In addition, the loss of tradition is an opportunity to “popularize” critical thinking. The activity of thinking takes place in the gap between past and future that used to be felt only by those few who made thinking their professional enterprise. By providing a reliable transition from past to future, tradition relieved most people from the necessity to think. In modern times, its disintegration revealed the gap for everyone. (Arendt 1961: 14) The disorienting effect of this might make one cling to the habit of following traditional norms even if their content has become unconvincing. On the other hand, the realization that there are no ready-made rules to count on might arouse our faculty of thinking and, by consequence, judgement to an unprecedented extent. The necessary virtues of these are courage and independence. As Kant wrote in the beginning of “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) the reason for our self-imposed immaturity is lack of courage (1991: 54).

Remembrance is important since it gives depth to our thinking and to our world. Arendt writes in “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” (1965-1966) demonstrating the interconnectedness of thinking, remembering and diverting catastrophes:

The greatest evildoers are those who don't remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, without remembrance, nothing can hold them back. For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur — the *Zeitgeist* or History or simple temptation. The greatest evil is not radical, it has no roots, and because it has no roots it has no limitations, it can go to unthinkable extremes and sweep over the whole world. (Arendt 2003b: 95)

Remembering the past — personal or collective — gives depth to thought. It also assures the worldliness of the life of the mind — the lived experiences of other generations and

mine will be stored in my memory ready to be made present by imagination. So, critical thinking makes past experiences adaptable to an uncertain reality protecting us from succumbing to the forces of thoughtlessness.

Arendt rightly admits that it is not easy to change the habit of applying certain categories for thinking and judging and to learn to do so without general rules and critically (Arendt 2003a: 37). Furthermore, was not thinking deemed impotent during times of crises precisely because it can avert a catastrophe only for those who already think? It is true that thinking on its own can do very little for politics either in times of emergencies or in modern times in general. Nonetheless judgement, the manifestation of thinking in the public realm, has a vital role in upholding and expanding the public realm — with judgement, egoism is overcome. Under totalitarianism, where the public, as well as the private realm, have been annihilated, judgement — even if it is possible — does not hold such power. However, during times of normalcy, when the public realm is intact, judgement becomes an irreplaceable faculty. It is essential for the public realm for two reasons: first, it fixes political phenomena by revealing its meaning and thus keeping it from disappearances; second, it electrifies thinking in others. I will deal with these separately in the following paragraphs.

So far we have seen how the common world — living together with others — keeps thinking critical and the dialogue between me and myself in good condition. Thinking as the quest for meaning can be relevant for the world when judgement makes it manifest. Judgement then has an illuminating effect to the public realm. A recurrent theme in Arendt's work is that the public realm is not constituted by actors, but by spectators: political actors are dependent on the opinion of spectators (Arendt 1982: 55, 61). Spectators see what is hidden from the actor, namely the meaning of the event. The meaning of an event is revealed from a general standpoint — that actors by virtue of having a part in the event do not possess — when the event has come to pass. It is the public that will decide what it was all about. The significance of an event lies in its capacity to open up “new horizons for the future”. (*Ibid.*: 52, 54, 56) So the meaning of an event should inspire *hope* (*Ibid.*: 45). Though spectators judge retrospectively an incident that passed recently or a long time ago, the aim is always to affirm the meaningfulness of human affairs. It is the task of political spectators — the public — to bring to light the gravity of actions and events, in order to save political phenomena from disappearance.

Hence the task of the public is to set “this process of narration in motion and of involving us in it” (Arendt 1970: 21). The ability to judge is not limited to historians, poets or professional opinion leaders; it is familiar to every ordinary person who reflects on her own life story (*Ibid.*). Moreover, Arendt does not simplistically classify people into actors and spectators — the viewpoint of a judge also exists within the actor, otherwise she could not make her actions generally communicable (Arendt 1982: 63).<sup>3</sup>

The power of people who judge in public is the example they give and the electrifying effect they have on those who listen. Arendt underlines the electrifying effect that thinking has on judgement in the mind of the thinker herself; namely, it loosens up ossified rules for subsuming particulars. I would argue that judgement likewise triggers thinking, but in virtue of its public character — it is always directed at being communicated to others —, the impact it has is never just for the thinker herself. Judgement can also cause a ripple effect of thinking in others.

The same applies to withholding judgement: it is not merely a result of thoughtlessness, but also a cause for further thoughtlessness. As Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961): “As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution (2000: 347).” Using Arendt’s metaphors it can be said that the absence of judgement in the public realm will increase the likelihood that a person will not meet the witness who awaits her at home.

It is important to note that judgement cannot create a public realm where it has ceased to exist. That was the case under totalitarianism where plurality, that is the condition of the public realm, was annihilated: if there exists only one opinion, the world — “the interspaces between men” — vanishes (Arendt 1970: 31). Judgement can only uphold and enrich the public realm guaranteeing that not one, but many opinions exist in it.

Therefore, judgement, by making thinking manifest in the world, does not merely open up new horizons for the future and reconcile us with the past in order to feel at home in the present. It expands our common world and forms irreplaceable relations between human beings and political phenomena. When thinkers — either professional or not — withdraw

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<sup>3</sup> Here again Arendt draws on Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgements. The relationship between a political actor and a spectator is analogous to Kant’s distinction between an artist and a critic: though the artist possesses genius that the critic lacks, she must also possess taste in order to make her novelty understood by the critic who also possesses taste, i.e. the faculty for aesthetic judgement (Arendt 1982: 63).

from the political sphere of life, there is a qualitative and a quantitative loss to the world that cannot be compensated (*Ibid.*: 4-5). As Marieke Borren writes in her essay “‘A Sense of the World’: Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense” (2013):

Stories, opinions, and judgments, which presuppose the presence of others, play a constitutive role as they confer the quality of reality on the intersubjective, immaterial, and therefore highly fragile aspect of the world (231).

In times when we can no longer expect nor be satisfied with the narration of our common world to be handed down to us from authority — we need to have the courage to make it on our own. As Seyla Benhabib remarks it is precisely “in the fragility, unpredictability, and complexity of human affairs Arendt saw the sources of philosopher's contempt for this realm” (*Ibid.*: 113). The overarching aim of Arendt's work is to transcend this contempt — nobody, not even a philosopher, can leave the common world.

In conclusion, the answer to the question what roles does thinking occupy in the world is the following: in modern times when we have lost traditional guidelines for orientation in the world, critical thinking can help us find our way by liberating judgement from prejudice and discerning the relevant fragments of the past for today. Moreover, judgement — the manifestation of thinking in the world — upholds the public realm by revealing the meaning of past events and setting into motion the discourse among those who belong to it. In this way we can reclaim our trust in the world and “come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists” (Arendt 2005: 321-322).

## Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to analyse the relationship between thinking and the world in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. I began with establish Arendt as a theorist working within the phenomenological tradition. For Arendt politics is a fundamentally phenomenal realm. The central notion of politics is the world, i.e. a public realm that is shared by free and equal citizens that distinguish themselves through speech and action. Moreover, men are endowed with common sense that creates the world as a *common* reference point for everyone by guaranteeing the inter-subjective validity of our experiences.

I moved on to the experience of thinking that Arendt gives in “Thinking and Moral Considerations” and *Life of the Mind, Volume One: Thinking* since these are considered to be the main sources for thinking in Arendt’s work. Arendt described the experience of thinking in terms of worldlessness opposite of the worldly enterprise of knowledge. It’s defining feature is immateriality that presupposes a withdrawal from the world of appearances. Thinking itself is defined in line with Plato as the dialogue between me and myself in solitude. The by-product of thinking is conscience — to live with myself as the interlocutor of my inner dialogue there are certain limits to what I can do.

So far the standard of thinking had been the self. Considering that the standard of politics is the world, a question emerged: what role — if any — did thinking occupy in politics? We continued to follow Arendt line of thought in the aforementioned sources where she gives an ultimately unsatisfactory answer to this question. According to her thinking becomes relevant in times of emergencies when it can prevent catastrophes (like totalitarianism), *at least for myself*. In my critique of this answer I highlighted the impotence of thinking — since it relates only to the thinker herself — and questioned whether mental faculties were able to function in extreme political circumstances at all.

Lastly, I considered thinking in the background of Arendt’s view of modernity. I underlined two aspects of modern times: the distrust of common sense and the loss of tradition that escalated the experiences of isolation and loneliness together with meaninglessness. My goal was to demonstrate how the dialogue between me and myself relies on common sense to assure trust in myself as a conversation partner in solitude. Moreover, I introduced the ideas of *Selbstdenken* or independent thinking and representative thinking. The idea of the

public was significant for both. For starters, *Selbstdenken* as a critical activity requires open examination of ideas in order to purge the thinker from, as Socrates used to call unexamined opinions, mere wind-eggs. Representative thinking means to represent as many viewpoints as possible to achieve a general and impartial viewpoint that ground inter-subjectively valid judgements. Thus, both *Selbstdenken* and representative thinking presuppose plurality in order to be critical.

These methods of thinking are important when the loss of tradition has revealed the gap between past and future for all. Critical thinking can salvage the past from tradition that has lost its power to make sense of the world. Still fragments of the past can reveal in new ways how to orient in present circumstances. The general viewpoint achieved by representative thinking is ground for judgements made by political spectators. By judging spectators illuminate political phenomena by disclosing their meaning. This upholds the political realm in its phenomenal richness. Most the act of giving meaning to an event at times when one can no longer rely on ready-made rules of judgement inspires *hope*. Though we live a world where horrors like totalitarianism is possible, the future of the world and man's ability to begin again have not vanished. Likewise, though the opinion-writers in the *New York Times* tried to reconcile with the shocking election results — thus essentially reflecting on what had already happened —, the ultimate question that they were all silently asking was directed towards the future: “Where do we go from here?”

Lastly, both Bernstein and Benhabib raise the known problem in Arendt's concept of banality of evil. It seems that one of the greatest *thinker* of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Martin Heidegger, and the exemplary figure of mass thoughtlessness, Eichmann, belonged to the same political ideology (Bernstein 2001: 290-291; Benhabib 1996: 192). Obviously, these individuals are incomparable when it comes to the faculty of thinking. This hints that the intrinsic connection between thinking and abstaining from evil that Arendt postulates is somewhere lacking. In my view together with the conclusions of this thesis an examination of the link between thinking and abstaining from evil should be further supported by the relationship between a thinking individual and the world — the essentially plural realm of human affairs. It was not the aim of my thesis to take upon this task, but, hopefully, it is a justification for it

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## **Lühikokkuvõte: “Mõtlemine ja maailma seos Hannah Arendti filosoofias”**

Minu lõputöö eesmärk on analüüsida mõtlemise kui tähenduse avamisele orienteeritud tegevuse vahekorda maailmaga Hannah Arendti filosoofias. Mõtlemist piiritleb Arendt Platoni järgi kahekõnena minu ja minu enda vahel, kui olen maailmast eraldunud. Mõtlemisega kaasnev tagajärg on südametunnistus. Maailm on aga Arendti jaoks poliitiline mõiste: maailm kui avalik ruum, mida iseloomustab suhteline püsivus ning mille taustal kodanikud saavad end teostada kõne või tegutsemise läbi. Maailma alusprintsipiiks on mitmekesisus. Sellest johtuvalt on tööd kandev küsimus järgmine: missugune roll, kui üldse, on mõtlemisel maailmas, kui esimene nõuab viimasest eraldumist?

Väidan, et kuigi Arendt rõhutab mõtlemise võimet ära hoida moraalne katastroof vähemalt mõtleja enda jaoks, ei peitu selles mõtlemise poliitiline tähtsus. Poliitika mõõdupuuks on maailm, mõtlemise mõõdupuuks aga kooskõla iseendaga. Poliitika vaatenurgast, kus võim sünnib kodanike koostegutsemisest, on mõtlemine impotentne, kuna jagab inimesed singulaarsusteks. Ometi tõuseb Arendti filosoofias pinnale arusaam, et mõtlemine sõltub inimese suhtest maailmaga. See ilmneb, kui uurida Arendti modernismi kriitikat, mille põhijoonteks on uusaja teadusest välja kasvanud umbusaldus meelelise reaalsuse vastu ning traditsiooni hääbumine. Leides end korraga ebakindlas maailmas, hakkab inimene end kui vestluspartnerit umbusaldama. Selgub, et inimese osavõtt maailmast koos teiste inimestega, tagab ka mõtlemisoscuse. Mõtlemise subjektiivsuse ületab aga osustusvõime, mis võtab arvesse teiste inimeste perspektiivid, et tagada mõtte kommunikeeritavus. Traditsioonilise maailmapildi lagunemise järel on otsustusvõime hädatarvilik: tehes mõtlemise kui tähendusele suunatud tegevuse maailmas “nähtavaks”, hoiab otsustusvõime avalikku ruumi alal kasvava tähendusetuse vastu.

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